February 21st, 2024

The Honorable Richard Roth  
Chair, Senate Health Committee  
1021 O Street, Ste 7510  
Sacramento, CA 95814

CC:  Senator Wahab

RE: SB 980 (Wahab), 2024 Smile Act  

Dear Chair Roth:  

The California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA), one of the state’s foremost grassroots senior and disability advocacy organizations, representing over 1 million Californians, is proud to sponsor SB 980 (Wahab).

CARA is writing to express our support of SB 980 (Wahab) “The Smile Act,” which achieves the following:

1. Aligns existing law with regulations regarding crowns by lowering the statutory age of 21 to match the regulation age of 13, thereby expanding the existing benefit to now cover MediCal eligible beneficiaries 13 years of age and older, and;
2. Ensures dental implants are a covered benefit under Medi-Cal.

The most recent publication from the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) “Medi-Cal Monthly Eligible Fast Facts, January 2023” (statistics for October 2022) reports that there are 1,667,260 million Dual Eligible seniors, and 710,728 Seniors and Persons with Disabilities participating in the MediCal program. In order to qualify for Medi-Cal a person must be 138% of the poverty level,

Although Medi-Cal offers a comprehensive list of free or low-cost services to its participants, per the Medi-Cal 2024 Provider Handbook, “single tooth implants are not a benefit of the Medi-Cal Dental Program.” In order for patients to request a dental implant, they have to have an exceptional medical condition like: cancer of the mouth; severe loss of upper and lower jaw bone; skeletal deformities; or traumatic destruction of jaw, face or head (Medi-Cal Dental Provider Handbook 2024, page 113).

However, for anyone else who may need an implant, they must pay for it out of pocket. Seniors and disabled persons on Medi-Cal are already at the poverty threshold, so they have no financial means to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for a dental procedure that should be a covered benefit under Medi-Cal. The lack of accessible dental services across California means everyday Californians who are suffering from less dire, but no less significant, dental issues are simply having teeth removed without having that tooth replaced.

The 2024 Smile Act enjoys bipartisan support in the Senate, with 24 co-authors. This bill is an important step toward ensuring fair and equitable access to dental services for all Californians by guaranteeing dental implants
are a covered benefit under the Medi-Cal Dental Program, and aligning law with regulations regarding crowns by lowering the statutory age of 21 to the regulation age of 13.

For all these reasons, CARA sponsors SB 980 (Wahab) the “2024 Smile Act” and we respectfully request an “AYE” vote.

Sincerely,

Hene Kelly
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)

Keith Umemoto
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)

Cindy Young
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA)